

Wilson: Active citizenry can make a difference

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Last week was one of the most inspiring of my public service career as I participated in four historic town hall meetings across the 2nd Congressional District.

For 25 years, I have hosted numerous district meetings. Traditionally, attendance at such events averaged 50 people. In four town halls I held this past week, we had a total attendance of nearly 6,000 citizens — the largest congressional town halls in the history of Richland, Lexington and Beaufort counties.

The American people have clearly taken notice and decided to get involved.

There was genuine concern by over 90 percent of those attending these events that expanding government's control over our health care would limit individual freedom and choice. At each town hall, there were those exercising their right to protest either for or against the government health care plan, but their actions were patriotic not "un-American"; — as some have chosen to characterize them.

Those who have stood up and shown up to have their voices heard have already made a difference in this debate. The Obama administration intended to push through their massive overhaul of our health care system by July 31.

And, they would have succeeded were it not for informed individuals making the case for more time and scrutiny. Because of their efforts, citizens have discovered and brought to light numerous aspects of the health care overhaul (H.R. 3200) that are deeply troubling.

These include the end of life counseling program, which has been correctly highlighted by former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as a program which could lead to seniors being encouraged to seek less care in order to protect the government's bottom line. Additionally, the Trojan Horse known as the "public option" has also been revealed as a not-so-clever means to make Americans more dependent on government.

These proposals do not promote better medical care; they enhance the power of politicians.

Before the town halls, efforts were made to amend this troubling big-government plan. As a member of the Education and Labor Committee, I was grateful to add two key amendments to the bill as it was pushed through our committee during a 20-hour, all-night marathon. We successfully secured a clarification within the bill to protect TRICARE from being swallowed by the government option or subject to new mandates and expenses. Over 9 million military personnel and veterans utilize TRICARE.

My second amendment promoted a simple but powerful standard of governmental accountability: If it is good enough for the American people, it is good enough for Congress. This provision encourages members of Congress who vote in favor of a government-run plan to forgo their current health insurance and enroll themselves in that plan.

This amendment was reluctantly adopted by the committee during hour 19 of debate after many members of the majority had gone home. It is vital that the American people demand this provision stay in the bill.

Health care reform is too important to simply oppose the administration's misguided plan. This is why I was grateful to bring to town hall audiences an alternative plan, the Empowering Patients First Act (H.R. 3400). This bill would preserve the doctor-patient relationship through common-sense reforms focused on expanding health insurance opportunities, not shifting them into the hands of a health care czar.

It promotes association health plans to help small businesses provide insurance coverage to their employees at a reasonable price. This is in contrast to the administration's plan which imposes new taxes on small businesses — an action the National Federation of Independent Businesses has estimated will eliminate 1.6 million jobs. H.R.3400 expands coverage to the uninsured by legalizing the purchase of insurance across state lines, providing a more robust market to shop for affordable insurance.

The growing revelation that the big-government plan will amount to a costly takeover of our health care system is a direct consequence of the American people standing up to have their voices heard.

Thanks to an active and concerned citizenry, we now have the opportunity to pause; read the bill; contact friends and family across the nation; and, contact members of Congress and senators of both parties to urge them to reform health insurance, not take over our health care system.

Despite a well-coordinated mainstream media propaganda push by the administration and their allies, Americans remain unconvinced that more government at a higher price tag will bring any type of real, positive reform to our health care system. They want and deserve this honest debate.

Rep. Wilson represents the 2nd District in the U.S. House.